

Omar

An Evening with
the Boston Lyric
Opera

Tuesday, March 21
Luth Concert Hall
Prior Presents 2022–23

PRIOR
Performing Arts Center

Welcome

Dear friends,

Welcome to a special evening with the Boston Lyric Opera (BLO).

Tonight we will encounter a series of thrilling selections from the groundbreaking opera *Omar* by Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels, alongside other music from the repertoire of our BLO Emerging Artist guests.

Blending the Americana, Arabic, and West African folk music traditions of its historical characters and contemporary creators, *Omar* features a story and score unlike any in opera to date. I will confess to having listened to one number we'll hear tonight, "Julie's Aria," nearly every day since first encountering it during the planning of this event. After this evening's performance, I suspect that many of you will want to do the same. *Omar* bears relevance for students, faculty, and staff across the Holy Cross curriculum and for audiences throughout the greater region. It's wonderful to gather in such an intimate context to share in this striking new work.

Happily, our experience with the Boston Lyric Opera tonight is just the beginning: the College's collaboration with BLO will extend into programming for our 2023-2024 season. Led by General Director and CEO Bradley Vernatter, Boston Lyric Opera offers the inspiration of its artistry at an exciting juncture for the arts at the College. We can look forward together to more music to come.

Warmly,

Kyle Frisina
Interim Director, Prior Performing Arts Center

Program

Tonight's program will be performed without an intermission. It will be followed by a Q&A.

Welcome Remarks

David Angus, BLO Music Director

Orchestral Themes from Omar

by Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels

Brendon Shapiro^, Piano

Omar, Act 1, Sc. 3 "Where they get you from?"

by Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels, libretto by Rhiannon Giddens

Brianna J. Robinson*, Soprano

Fred C. VanNess, Jr.*, Tenor

Brendon Shapiro^, Piano

Omar, Act 1, Sc. 3 "Allah! Most Glorious, why did I not hear?"

by Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels, libretto by Rhiannon Giddens

Fred C. VanNess, Jr.*, Tenor

Brendon Shapiro^, Piano

Omar, Act 2, Sc. 2 "Home is home..."

by Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels, libretto by Rhiannon Giddens

Brianna J. Robinson*, Soprano

Fred C. VanNess, Jr.*, Tenor

Brendon Shapiro^, Piano

Omar, Act 2, Sc. 4 Psalm 23 "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

by Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels, libretto by Rhiannon Giddens

Fred C. VanNess, Jr.*, Tenor

Brendon Shapiro^, Piano

"Songs for the People"

by Mason Byner, text by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Brianna J. Robinson*, Soprano

Brendon Shapiro^, Piano

"O soave fanciulla" from La bohème

by Giacomo Puccini, libretto by Luigi Illica & Giuseppe Giacosa

Brianna J. Robinson*, Soprano

Fred C. VanNess, Jr.*, Tenor

Brendon Shapiro^, Piano

*Jane and Steven Akin Emerging Artist

^Jane and Steven Akin Emerging Artist Alumnus

Biographies

David Angus, Musical Director

Now in his thirteenth year as Boston Lyric Opera's music director, David Angus recently navigated new and innovative concepts of presenting opera online, serving as music director and conductor for the critically acclaimed productions of *desert in* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*. In addition to his ongoing work with BLO, Angus' upcoming projects include *Sweeney Todd* at the Royal Opera in Stockholm, *The Marriage of Figaro* in Prague (in the theater where Mozart conducted it himself!) and further CD recordings of new American works with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Prior to his time at Boston Lyric Opera, where he has conducted the majority of performances since 2011, Angus was music director of The Glimmerglass Festival in upstate New York and chief conductor of the Symphony Orchestra of Flanders in Belgium. He has led orchestras and choirs all over Europe — notably in Scandinavia, where he has been a regular guest with the Lahti Symphony Orchestra and several Danish orchestras. Born in England, he has conducted most of the major orchestras in Great Britain, including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra, most of the BBC orchestras, and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. In recent seasons, he made debuts at the Toscanini Orchestra in Parma, Italy and the Porto Symphony Orchestra in Portugal. He returned to Wexford Festival Opera, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the London Philharmonic, and the Huddersfield Choral Society, as well as to his former orchestra in Belgium for the world premiere of a major choral work. Angus spent his early years in Belfast. He was a boy chorister at King's College, Cambridge under Sir David Willcocks, and read music at Surrey University. He finished his training with a fellowship in conducting at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, where he won several prizes for opera conducting.

Brianna J. Robinson, Soprano

Soprano Brianna J. Robinson is a native of Ravenna, Ohio. Recently, Ms. Robinson was named a finalist in the 2021 Benjamin Matthews Vocal Competition with Opera Ebony. She returns to Boston Lyric Opera as a Jane and Steven Akin Emerging Artist, having covered roles in BLO's *The Handmaid's Tale* and performed the role of Lucy in Spears' *Fellow Travelers*. This season, she will cover Mimi in *La Boheme* and Julie in the New England premiere of *Omar*. Her most recent work includes singing the role of Florence Price in *Florence Comes Home* by Francine Trester with Shelter Music Boston, as a soloist with the Boston Landmarks Orchestra, and her Tanglewood concert debut with *Castle of Our Skins*. In the 2023 season, she will debut with the Akron Symphony performing Brahms' *Requiem* and New World Chorale performing Mozart's *Requiem*. Brianna has also participated in international programs such as the Berlin Opera Academy, and Opernfest Prague and made her international debut in Ruse, Bulgaria, as Ophelia in Joseph Summer's *Hamlet* in 2021. In January 2020, she was awarded 1st prize at the 6th "Getting to Carnegie" Competition at Carnegie Hall, New York City.

Fred C. VanNess, Jr., Tenor

Tenor Fred C. VanNess, Jr. performs a wide variety of repertoire on stages across New England. Mr. VanNess has appeared as Russell Davenport in Dan Shore's acclaimed new opera *Freedom Ride* presented in a co-production by MASSOpera and Chicago Opera Theater, Voltaire/Dr. Pangloss in *Candide*, Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*, Don José in *Carmen*, and Rodolfo in *La bohème*. An avid concert performer, Mr. VanNess is a member of Castle of our Skins, an organization dedicated to celebrating Black artistry through music. He has also been featured in a number of solo recitals with Lake Charles Symphony, Salem Philharmonic, and in an invite-only VIP performance at Coushatta Casino Resort. Mr. VanNess has developed and performed a one-man show, showcasing some of his favorite music alongside his unique point of view as an artist titled *When I Think of Home...*, which premiered at McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Mr. VanNess holds degrees from The Longy School of Music of Bard College, Louisiana State University and McNeese State University.

Brendon Shapiro, Pianist

Pianist, vocal coach, and conductor Brendon Shapiro is quickly garnering a reputation from coast to coast as a champion of new music and opera of the 20th and 21st centuries. He is a Jane and Steven Akin Emerging Artist Alum with Boston Lyric Opera where he has served as pianist and coach for *The Rape of Lucretia*, *Pagliacci*, and *Cavalleria Rusticana*, as well as performing in the video series *B.* and the world premiere of Omar Najmi's song cycle, *my name is Alondra*. He looks forward to returning this year to work on *Bluebeard's Castle/4 Songs* and *Omar*. He recently returned to LA Opera to serve on the music staff for *Omar*, after being a member of their Young Artist Program from 2018-2020. While a young artist there, he worked with such artists as Renée Fleming and Susan Graham and played a key role in the musical preparation for the world premiere of Matthew Aucoin's *Eurydice* along with many other productions. Brendon has been on the music staff at numerous summer festivals around the United States, including Bard SummerScape, Phoenicia International Festival of the Voice, Opera Maine, Opera Steamboat, Opera North, and Opera NEO. Brendon has also been on the music staff with Odyssey Opera, Opera Omaha, and the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra and has served as Assistant Conductor at Boston Conservatory for several recent productions. Brendon is a co-founder and co-artistic director of Catalyst New Music, where he was the music director for the workshop performances of Omar Najmi's *This is Not That Dawn* and *En la ardiente oscuridad*, and is currently producing and performing in the recital series *FUSE: Collaborations in Song*. Additionally, Brendon is the Executive Director of Boston Singers' Resource, a nonprofit dedicated to providing classical singers with the tools they need to pursue their careers.

Boston Lyric Opera

The mission of Boston Lyric Opera is to build curiosity, enthusiasm, and support for opera by creating musically and theatrically compelling productions, events, and educational resources for the Boston community and beyond. Both locally and beyond, Boston Lyric Opera leads the way in celebrating the art of the voice through innovative programming and community engagement initiatives that redefine the opera-going experience. Now in its 46th Season, BLO is the largest and longest-lived opera company in New England. Since its founding in 1976, the company has staged world premieres, U.S. premieres, co-productions and co-commissions of note with organizations such as The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, Scottish Opera and San Francisco Opera and continues to be a destination for some of the leading artists, conductors, directors and designers from around the world.

Prior Performing Arts Center

A catalyst for creativity and learning, the Prior Performing Arts Center amplifies the arts at Holy Cross and provides the College, the greater Worcester community, and visiting creative thinkers with an inspiring environment to pursue diverse questions of the human experience.

For more information, visit www.priorperformingartscenter.org.

Arts Transcending Borders

Initially funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Arts Transcending Borders is an initiative designed to enhance the role of the arts in every aspect of the Holy Cross experience by infusing the arts into students' academic lives and creating new opportunities throughout the curriculum and the community to cross cultural, geographic, and disciplinary boundaries.

Arts Transcending Borders Staff

Marta Beyer, Assistant Director, Arts Transcending Borders
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Michaela McHugh '23, ATB Ambassador
John O'Keefe '25, ATB Ambassador

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